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SUBJECT: SOUTHEAST TURKEY UPDATE: ANTI-PKK OPERATIONS AND
POLITICAL TRENDS

Classified By: POL Counselor John W. Kunstadter for reasons 1.4 (b) & (d).

THIS IS A JOINT AMEMBASSY ANKARA/AMCONSUL ADANA CABLE.

1.(C) Summary: During AMCON Adana's recent visit to several southeast Turkish provinces, observations of military activity and discussions with contacts confirm a large ongoing TGS counterterrorism offensive in both the vicinity of north Diyarbakir province and the mountainous areas of eastern Sirnak and western Hakkari province. Contacts report heavy PKK losses and relatively light Turkish military losses. Turkish National Police (TNP) and Interior ministry officials report little PKK activity in Diyarbakir or other regional small cities and towns where they have jurisdiction. The Diyarbakir security director charged that PKK had tried to abuse TNP sensitivity toward funeral ceremonies to use them to promote pro-PKK propaganda, adding that he was determined that PKK not be allowed a new propaganda channel in otherwise relatively calm SE urban areas. Regional civil society contacts reported relative calm in urban areas in contrast to a very mixed situation in rural areas, especially in Sirnak, Hakkari, Diyarbakir, Bingol and Tunceli provinces. These contacts report widespread concern throughout the southeast region that the overall regional security situation is deteriorating and the populace's anxiety has risen noticeably. End Summary.

2.(C) During AMCON Adana's 6/29-7/1 visit to Diyarbakir, Batman, Mardin and Sirnak provinces in southeast Turkey, observations of military activity and discussions with contacts confirm a large ongoing TGS counterterrorism offensive in both the vicinity of north Diyarbakir province and the mountainous areas of eastern Sirnak and western Hakkari province. AMCON Adana team members observed 4 UH-60 and 2 UH-1 helicopters at Diyarbakir's main Army airfield, an increase from lift assets observed there in earlier June 2005 and heard night helicopter lift operations from Diyarbakir on the evening of 6/29 and 6/30. Both the Diyarbakir Security Director and a Sirnak sub-governor said that there had been heavy Turkish military operations in mountainous rural areas in SE Turkey since "early Spring" and independently reported heavy PKK losses and relatively light Turkish military losses. The Sirnak sub-governor said that up to six PKK had been killed in clashes in western Sirnak in the last week with no Jandarma casualties. (Note: this was generally confirmed by Syriac community contacts with strong local links in this region. End Note.) Asked whether the PKK had crossed the Iraqi border to stage attacks or come from local levies, he said that it was hard to tell and that both scenarios were possible. He said that no PKK had been captured alive in Sirnak this year to his knowledge. He also said that the PKK killed so far had included both men and women and ranged in age from 20 to 45.

3.(C) Both the Sirnak sub-governor and UNHCR contacts in Silopi (strictly protect) suggested that travel in western Sirnak province, in the vicinity of Uludere and Beytussebap, was not advisable "on security grounds." Syriac community contacts in Mardin told AMCON Adana PO that Syrian diaspora visitors from the U.S. and western Europe had been denied travel access to the small Syriac villages in the vicinity of Uludere on 6/28.

4.(C) By contrast to heavy TGS operations, Turkish National Police (TNP) and Interior ministry officials report little PKK activity in Diyarbakir or other regional small cities and towns where they have jurisdiction. The Diyarbakir security director on 6/29 told AMCON Adana PO that, aside from bombing incident in Diyarbakir, the actual urban area of Diyarbakir, which is TNP jurisdiction, had been calm. Mentioning recent funerary service-related "anti-PKK" violence in Van and Diyarbakir, he charged that PKK had tried to abuse TNP sensitivity toward funeral ceremonies to use them to promote pro-PKK propaganda, adding that he was determined that PKK not be allowed a new propaganda channel in otherwise relatively calm southeast urban areas. He offered his account of the Diyarbakir incident in which TNP had monitored the funeral of the reported PKK member and, he said, only intervened after the family had left, when a small number of attendees started shouting pro-PKK slogans and criticism of Abdullah Ocalan's solitary imprisonment on Imrali island. In

contrast, he said that, to his admittedly second-hand knowledge, the Jandarma in the Van incident had been "less adept," intervening in a broader fashion, interrupting part of the funeral process and using force earlier than TNP would be inclined. He said that Jandarma forces typically involved in these "security operations" have less training and less direct management than their TNP counterparts. (Comment: Southeast Turkish human rights activists made similar observations to PO. End Comment.)

5.(C) Regional civil society contacts in Diyarbakir and Batman reported relative calm in urban areas in contrast to a very mixed situation in rural areas, especially in Sirnak, Hakkari, Diyarbakir, Bingol and Tunceli provinces. One civil society contact recounted his mid-June almost two-week family trip to Bingol, Van, Mus, Bitlis and Agri provinces in which he had encountered "little different (military presence) from the ordinary this time of year," although he had heard from other travelers of heavy clashes further northwest in Tunceli. However, these contacts report widespread concern throughout the southeast region that the overall regional security situation is deteriorating and the populace's anxiety has risen noticeably.

6.(C) "No one wants to go back to the bad old days," one contact said, "but many of us feel like the countryside is starting to head that way. We almost feel like we cannot do anything to stop it and that is frustrating a lot of people."

"We just want to keep the calm of the last few years, to build some prosperity and for the government to keep up the democratic reform and give the Kurdish people some respect as a people," said a longtime Batman attorney contact and former IV program attendee. He lamented that some reforms, like private Kurdish language schools, already were dying on the vine as they closed one by one based on low demand and financial insolvency. He went on to criticize the closure of Egitim-Sen and to profess his disappointment that the GoT would not even discuss teaching some courses in non-Turkish in public schools. He also said that many regional Kurds were disappointed that the GoT and the Turkish military had not embraced the recent call for a ceasefire and regional reform launched by 140 Turkish intellectuals. "We did not expect the government to immediately change because of this call, but the TGS attacked it and the government ignored it. How can we believe that they are interested in the Kurdish issue with such a reaction?" he asked rhetorically.

7.(C) In a 6/29 meeting with the AMCON Adana PO, acting Diyarbakir mayor Yusuf Akgun reflected similar sentiments as reported in para. 6 regarding overall popular regional sentiment in the face of increasing TGS clashes with the PKK.

He also said that, "since about six months ago or roughly after the EU December 2004 decision, the AK party government stopped talking to DEHAP and other Kurdish leaders about reform or political initiatives concerning the Kurdish question. There is no action from the GoT on the Kurdish issue now, other than growing fear of, and suspicion toward, the Democratic Society Movement (DSM). He noted that DEHAP had received clear indications that press reports of Interior Ministry instructions to TNP to monitor and report on DSM activities is true." "(TNP) are filming meetings, asking people about the DSM and watching it closely. They fear it because it will come from the grassroots and not have elites that the government can easily manipulate," Akgun said. (Comment: Other Kurdish contacts generally confirm growing TNP interest in DSM, but profess less confidence in the political movement's eventual strength or likely success. End Comment.) AMCON Adana PO cautioned Akgun that the Diyarbakir mayor's office (Note: Mayor Osman Baydemir was traveling to a meeting in Istanbul on 6/29. End Note.) should distance itself from the PKK and embrace calls for a political approach to the region's agenda. Akgun, in response, offered a mixed defense of the Diyarbakir mayor's relative posturing based on "the need for a Kurdish armed struggle in the face of GoT aggression, an acceptance of the "necessity for a peaceful resolution of regional problems," and a realpolitik observation that "it was politically unrealistic for a prominent DEHAP or Kurdish leaders to distance himself too far from the PKK, which he called a 10,000-person strong political reality in southeast Turkish politics." Another mayoral aide put it to the PO more succinctly, saying that "Baydemir knows that the PK violence is not the way out of the region's problems and wants a peaceful resolution, but there is not one being offered by the Turkish State. In the meantime, Baydemir wants to have a political future in the region in wider electoral situations and the PKK is still very popular in the countryside and some towns. Distancing himself from the PKK too much would be political suicide and he is a young man," the contact said.

8.(C) Comment: TGS operations this year are heavier compared with Summer 2004. In both periods, however, the basic reality is that the AKP government has no discernible policy and has abdicated action to the TGS. Both the TNP (answerable to the government) and the TGS appear to be defining most of those in southeast Turkey who want to talk about regional political issues as suspected terrorists or

terrorist sympathizers and using either force against them or marshalling police efforts to monitor them. This approach risks undermining already shallow public faith in the GoT's commitment to meaningful long-term democratic reform and civil society growth in southeast Turkey and -- in the southeast, but not elsewhere -- decreases the perceived (and already limited) legitimacy of TGS counterterrorism operations against the actual PKK (as well as DHKP-C and MLKP) cadres which it encounters in the region. Unchecked by new reform momentum, the complete absence of political dialogue in the last six months further risks a regional drifting backwards toward more open confrontation. The reason for this has less to do with any Iraqi/coalition counterterrorism offensive against the PKK, as GoT and TGS contacts largely suggest, than it has to do with the complete lack of a political engagement policy on the part of the AKP government.

9.(C) Comment, cont'd: When you add EU Commission Chief Barosso talking about Turkish accession in terms perceived in southeast Turkey as a softening EU commitment and TGS DCHOD Basbug's recent public rushing to squash any discussion of southeast political issues as something other than a topic for army planners to address, the mood in southeast Turkey among the fledgling civil society is fairly downbeat. End Comment.

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